

VZCZCXRO2777

OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHKB #1811 3461308

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 121308Z DEC 06

FM AMEMBASSY BAKU

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1965

INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNOSC/ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN EUROPE PRIORITY

RHMFIS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 001811

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/12/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: ANS TV AND RADIO RESUME BROADCASTS

REF: BAKU 1713

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jason P. Hyland per 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) At a December 11 press conference, National TV and Radio Council (NTRC) Chair Nushiravan Maharramli announced that independent media group ANS would be allowed to resume television and radio broadcasts on December 12. (ANS broadcasts had been suspended on November 24, when the NTRC decided not to renew ANS' broadcast license on grounds that ANS had violated broadcasting regulations, see reftel). Citing appeals made by "Azerbaijan's intelligentsia, sports figures, leading media outlets, and (GOAJ human rights) ombudswoman," Maharramli said the decision to resume ANS broadcasts had been made at a December 11 NTRC meeting, attended by ANS representatives Mirshahin Agayev and Seyfulla Mustafayev. Maharramli noted that this decision would not restore ANS' license; he said that ANS must participate in the NTRC's ongoing tender for ANS' frequency in order for the license to be restored. ANS VP Seyfulla Mustafayev confirmed to PAO today that ANS would participate in the tender, adding that ANS had been told that is "the way to resolve the problem."

¶2. (U) ANS resumed FM radio broadcasts in the early morning hours of December 12, and resumed its television broadcasts with its regularly scheduled 12:00 pm news program on December 12. It also ran its regularly scheduled 3:00 pm news program. Embassy staff who watched both broadcasts report that they were up to ANS' usual independent standards, reporting issues of interest both to the government and the opposition. Other programming during the day has focused on historical films, as December 12 is the third anniversary of Heydar Aliyev's death and all television channels are showing cultural or historic broadcasts in deference to the occasion.

¶3. (C) There is widespread speculation among Baku's political commentators about the possible reasons for the decision to allow ANS to resume broadcasts pending the outcome of the tender for its license. The decision represents a major about-face for NTRC Chairman Maharramli, who publicly excluded this possibility on December 8. Some observers have hailed the decision as the positive result of public and foreign pressure on the GOAJ since the November 24 suspension took effect. It was clear to all, even at the NTRC and the Presidential aparat, that the shutdown of ANS was highly unpopular along ordinary Azerbaijanis and the international community alike. Some pro-opposition newspapers speculate that the decision came after the ANS issue was uncomfortably raised with First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva during her visit to Washington last week. Other observers worry that ANS will not be quite the same, and will no longer be as independent a media voice as it has been, after the pressure

applied to it. We have reliable reports that when the Director of Turan news agency Mehman Aliyev and former Presidential adviser Eldar Namazov both called ANS VP Seyfulla Mustafayev after the announcement to ask him whether they should congratulate him or offer their condolences, he responded "condolences." We heard separately from a reliable source that a businessman close to the President purchased a majority stake in the television in return for making ANS' political problems go away. Finally, the whole issue of the tender still needs to be worked out.

¶4. (C) Comment: In Azerbaijan's murky political world, only one thing is certain: ANS is broadcasting again. The resumption of ANS broadcasts is a welcome development and we will continue to urge the GOAJ to resolve the outstanding legal issues pertaining to its license. We will also monitor the station closely over time to determine whether the new ANS is the same ANS that was shut down on November 24. For now, Azerbaijanis are delighted to see their most popular source of news and other programming back on the air.
HYLAND